

**Book review of *Feedback in Second Language Writing: Contexts and Issues*
Edited by Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland (2nd edition)**

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Feedback in Second Language Writing... edited by Ken and Fiona Hyland has been a required text in my course on *Second Language Writing* for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. I have also incorporated selected chapters in *TESOL Methods*, *Second Language Acquisition*, and individual reading courses. As a researcher of feedback in SLW, I have been inspired by this book. The second edition will continue to be a reference material.

The book succeeds at providing “a state-of-the-art picture of the key issues in feedback today” (p. xiii). The chapters, written by well-known experts in feedback in SLW, reflect the timeless questions that both (student-)teachers and researchers want answers to: why do we even offer feedback; how does good feedback look across users (peers, teachers/supervisors, reviewers) and modalities (written, online forums, social media); and what triggers high engagement with it? The chapters represent a wide variety of contexts, including ESL and EFL; K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and professional; face-to-face and online SLW. The book models and promotes the centrality of sociocultural and sociocognitive perspectives in the research and pedagogical applications of feedback in SLW. Emphasis is placed on the interactive, culturally mediated, yet individual-centered nature of feedback, because this seems to be a significant blind spot in our understanding of how and why feedback works so far. This idea, rather than isolated contexts or conventional categorizations of levels and such, compellingly controls the structure of the book and pushes forward the research agenda in the field. At the same time, those who may be interested in feedback in specific contexts, can still read selected chapters and learn a lot.

Readers will appreciate that much is different in the second edition compared to the first: only four chapters are updates of the older versions; the remaining ten are new. The four chapters that reoccur in an updated form represent

- core theoretical perspectives about feedback (Ch. 2 – “Sociocultural theory...”);
- the long-standing issue of “Appropriation, ownership, and agency...” (Ch. 4), whose theme is picked up by other new chapters;
- the fundamental question of whether feedback is helpful (Ch. 6); and
- an exploration of interpersonality (Ch. 9).

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The latter is developed into an entirely new section: “Engaging with feedback: student participation dimensions.” The addition of this section reflects the importance of understanding how L2 writers engage with feedback from a cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspective.

The book relies on impressive amounts of robust research which lend credibility to the field. Clearly, the research on feedback in SLW has come a long way even from the 2006 edition. The chapters build an impressive picture of abundant and varied experimental and ethnographic research conducted longitudinally, with both large groups and individual cases. Many chapters take pedagogical care to define concepts and the state of the field in terms of what they are as well as what they are not, for the benefit of new students and researchers. We see this particularly in Section 1, where the problematic concept of culture is discussed, and in Section 2 – “Shaping feedback”, where the massive amounts of research on CF are reviewed and made sense of. Every chapter also reflects on pedagogical implications, and for this the book remains a useful selected reading for teacher preparation courses.

The book consistently highlights what is – in part or as a whole – new and valuable in the field. Thus, Section 1 takes a chance on reviving the idea that culture exists and matters in the classroom. Vilamil and Guerrero synthesize large studies conducted in Costa Rica which demonstrate that, in a homogenous cultural context which values interaction and social learning, peer-to-peer feedback led to more self-regulation and revisions. Guangwei Hu argues that macrocultural (ethnic, national, and international), mesocultural (local, municipality, corporate or university-level), and microcultural (classroom and individual) ideologies become manifest in peer feedback. Hu shows that teachers can intervene, through awareness raising activities, at the microcultural level to increase the usefulness of peer reviews. Finally, Christine Tardy explores the ways in which feedback, as a dialogic process, helps L2 writers develop agency and ownership over texts.

Section 2 balances two chapters on fundamentals of CF and SLA, on the one hand, with two other chapters on less common means of providing feedback – Automatic Written Evaluation and collaborative writing, respectively. The chapters by Bitchener, and Ferris and Kurzer, respectively, address must-know aspects of feedback research and highlight new developments. Ferris and Kurzer review the CF research post 2006, pointing out that it made up for the design flaws of the early days. In fact, studies show definitive and even long-term gains in accuracy for the L2 writers who receive written CF. Both chapters note the need to investigate the role of individual and contextual moderating factors. Ferris and Kurzer place a new spotlight on the merits of Dynamic Written CF. The remaining two chapters implicitly challenge the readers to consider what would happen if feedback were provided in less conventional ways. AWE, at one end of the spectrum, is a technologized way of dealing with feedback; at the other end of the spectrum, Storch proposes an intervention in which human interaction is central: collaborative writing. Regarding AWE, Stevenson and Phakiti educate us that it has been around since the late 1960s and it yields high agreement rates between automatic and human scorers as well as improved accuracy among L2 writers. The authors call for more studies on classroom uses and AWE’s capability to assess creativity. Storch persuasively presents collaborative writing as an opportunity for peers to engage in exchanging

feedback on tasks, language, grammar, and semantics (even when collaborating online). The author has pedagogical recommendations for peer pairing strategies and even grading. The sample interactions analyzed in her chapter themselves make it possible for the reader to imagine how collaborative writing might look in practice.

The second half of the book dives into aspects of interpersonality, individuality, and learner engagement. The central idea is that feedback has social purpose; when providing it, teachers should – as many do – consider the students’ needs, feelings, goals, and ideas while remaining “clear, consistent, helpful and constructive” (p.182). Based on a study of tutors and students in a MOOC, Hewings and Coffin argue that it is important that teachers and tutors be present. In their study, forum interactions which did not contain feedback did not lead to as much dialogue or reflection. Starfield points out the motivational importance of positive supervisory feedback. She also looks at supervisory feedback as scaffold in a novice writer’s development. Paltridge’s chapter on reviewers’ feedback on journal submissions finds that reviewers respond similarly to native and non-native-English-speaking writers in terms of how they express stance.

One of the main goals and accomplishments of the book is that it brings to prominence the importance of student engagement with feedback. For Han and F. Hyland, learner engagement is sociocognitive rather than either social or cognitive, and this way of viewing it marks a new research orientation. Chapters in the final section of the book reiterate, through case studies, that learners and teachers align when teachers design activities and feedback based on an understanding of their students’ perspectives, knowledge, beliefs, and goals. The idea that teachers need to be present and generous with their feedback in order to support learner engagement and a deep understanding of writing comes across from student testimonies. Chapters iterate the need for teachers to teach their students how to engage with activities which generate valuable feedback. As if sensing that teachers reading the book may start to feel that the onus of making feedback work despite individual variation among students is solely on them, Yim and Warschauer present a study of eighth-grade ELA writing projects involving group writing via Google docs. The authors highlight numerous instances of peer-to-peer scaffolding and other community building behaviors in the oral and written feedback exchanged by peers. Online collaborative writing emerges as rich in opportunities to engage and learn through simultaneous online drafting and peer editing.

Overall, the book is indeed reflective of major interests in SLW. It thoroughly illustrates the many contexts and research designs which can facilitate the investigation of feedback. It is the responsibility of researchers from here on to design solid studies like the ones featured in this book’s chapters in order to maintain the gains made in the research on feedback in SLW in the last two decades. Perhaps a future edition may offer not only theoretical and research updates and future directions, but also more detailed illustrations of pedagogical applications. Practitioners would undoubtedly be interested in teaching applications which are mindful of individuality but remain effective without overburdening teachers. All in all, however, the current edition of the book certainly maintains its relevance for both researchers and teachers.